

Blanketing the skies

Air defense in the Army is just one tactical piece of the overall picture that conveys the superiority of the U.S. and its armed forces as a whole. Air defense's purpose is to help protect the U.S. and its allies from various threats from both sky and space. By intercepting and destroying these threats, air defense provides a blanket of security for the Army's assets and the Soldiers operating at home and abroad.

As many nations around the world develop their militaries, it has become cheaper for those who would threaten the U.S. to obtain cheap, devastating weaponry which can compromise the safety of our assets and our fellow servicemembers around the globe. Air defense is, more than ever, a critical enabler in the U.S. Army.



SGT Ryan Hildebrandt hands a Stinger missile to SGT Wade Russell, both part of 1st Battalion, 188th Air Defense Artillery, 40th Infantry Division, North Dakota Army National Guard, for loading in a pod on board an Avenger at a live-fire exercise in Fort Bliss, Texas, Sept. 20, 2008. (Photo by SGT Jonathan Haugen, U.S. Army)

The Threat. Tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles, either operational or being developed by adversarial nations, are a growing threat. Tactical ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles are cost-effective means to project power over vast areas. Countries and civilians seeking to do devastating damage to U.S. military assets or their neighboring countries understand manning and maintaining aircraft is not a viable means of threat. They realize an effective missile system or unmanned aerial vehicle can do the job at a significantly cheaper cost.

The job of defending American forces from air threats, especially the Army, falls upon air defense artillery and specifically the air defenders that make up the branch. Air defense artillery understands these growing and changing threats and defends the skies and protects Soldiers around the world. Consisting of various military occupational specialties, weapon systems and intelligence-gathering equipment, air defense helps shield ground forces from the enemy.

Equipment such as the Patriot Air Defense System, Theater High Altitude Air Defense System and Avenger Missile Defense System are just a few of the weapons in the Army's arsenal that help provide a blanket of security over the armed forces and key assets. These systems are essential, but cannot be effective unless intelligence gathered on the battlefield by various sources, such as satellite, radar sensors and human intelligence, are combined to put the crosshairs on the threat.

The 14J. The Military Occupational Specialty 14J Air Defense Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence Tactical Operations Center Enhanced Operator is a key component in ADA. A 14J Soldier supervises or serves

as a member of an early air threat warning network section, team or platoon in operations and intelligence functions. This MOS gathers and combines intelligence from various sources to form a clear picture of the air above the battlefield and relay that information to the firing units.

The 14J operator is a versatile individual, and his job does not consist of just one piece of equipment or duty, but includes several pieces of hardware and many duties all wrapped up into one. The mission of a 14J Soldier is to operate and maintain the Air Defense System Integrator, the Air and Missile Defense Workstation, Forward Area Air Defense Engagement Operations, the Tactical Airspace Integration System and Sentinel radars. By maintaining all these systems, it allows many puzzle pieces of information to come together and form a picture which allows air defense commanders to use their defense assets in an efficient and effective manner.

Training as a 14J Soldier is both challenging and rewarding. Missile readiness and joint exercises with both the Air Force and Navy help prepare 14Js for the challenges of integration and for ensuring firing units have all the information they need to function as efficiently as possible.

On-the-job training is also important to the 14J, who learns to do everything from PowerPoint presentations to computer network design and integration on a daily basis. Training on specific equipment and real-world training exercises are also keys to development for the 14J Soldier. With so many pieces of equipment and tasks to perform, it is vital that 14J Soldiers attend various refresher schools that strictly focus on the equipment.

As the air threats continue to increase throughout the world, the U.S. Army depends on ADA to shield its ground forces from the threats from above. Intercepting and destroying the different weapons which can affect the safety and security of our forces is an ongoing process that involves the training and expertise of all air defenders. ADA assures the blanket of protection for Soldiers engaged in battle never falters and that a Soldier will never have to look up and wonder if it's safe. ■

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